

Feeding the Vegetarian Baby

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This is a guide for parents who wish to bring their child up on a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet (a diet which includes eggs, milk and milk products).

INTRODUCING YOUR BABY TO SOLID FOODS

You should start giving your baby solid foods (often called 'weaning') when they are around six months old. The latest research from the World Health Organisation shows that before this time your baby, for a variety of reasons is not ready for anything else apart from breast milk or formula milk (see section below on risks of starting early).

If you are breast feeding, giving only breast milk up to six months will provide your baby with extra protection against infection. Breastfeeding beyond six months alongside solid foods will continue to protect your baby for as long as you carry on.

If you are bottle feeding, you should give your baby infant formula until around six months and continue it afterwards along with solid foods until the baby is a year old.

If your baby seems hungrier before the age of six months, give them extra milk feeds.

Premature babies may be ready for solids at different times. Ask your Health Professional for advice on what is best for your baby.

Your baby is ready if they can:

- Stay in a sitting position and hold their head steady
- Co-ordinate their eyes, hands and mouth so that they can look at food, pick it up and put it in their mouth all by themselves
- Swallow Food. Babies who are not ready will push their food back out, so they get more around their face than they do around their mouths.

Misleading signs:

- Waking at night when they have previously slept through
- Watching you eat. Babies are curious, they love to watch everything you do
- Weight gain faltering. Milk is what young babies' need, so give more. First weaning foods are usually vegetables, which have few calories for growing babies
- Chewing fists. Your baby is now able to move their arms with purpose. They use their mouths to explore anything they discover

Potential risks of starting early:

- The digestive system is not mature.
- Milk intake will be reduced. Babies will miss out on essential nutrients. If breastfeeding, milk production will reduce
- Future obesity
- Respiratory infections
- There could be a greater risk of choking. Babies need to be sitting upright and taking food at their own pace. They have a 'gag' reflex that helps move food away from the airway and this is not developed yet if weaning too early

How to start

There are different ways of introducing solids initially.

At *6 months* as your baby should be ready to handle food you could try a Baby-Led approach.

Baby-Led Weaning misses out the pureed food stage.

Babies join in at family mealtimes and are offered a variety of foods in pieces that are easy for them to handle. Generally sticks of food so they can explore the bit that sticks out of their closed fist.

Babies feed themselves from the start and are not spoon fed. They decide what they want to eat and how much. They set their own pace and begin to reduce their milk intake when they are ready.

This method is said to help babies regulate their eating and recognize more easily when they are full.

Traditional Weaning involves spoon feeding pureed food for a few weeks then moving on to finger foods. This method gives more control to the parents and reduces the time (and sometimes the mess) that mealtimes involve.

You could combine the best bits from both. If baby is self-feeding then give him a spoon and help him dip in to yogurts and sauces that he may otherwise miss out on.

Babies often handle the lumpy stage better, the sooner they are given the opportunity to learn with finger foods.

Important Points

- Do not use salt in food, or give salty foods and snack e.g. ready-made soups and sauces. Salt can be harmful to young babies
- Do not add sugar- this avoids the development of a sweet habit and potential harm to developing teeth.
- Do not give honey until 1 year. Harmful spores can be present in honey
- Encourage self-feeding as soon as they are interested. Don't delay too long, using all the mouth and tongue muscles for chewing and moving food around helps prepare them for speech.
- Never force feed. If they are not interested this time – they might be the next time! Make sure that milk feeds are given regularly at first as this is the food babies need and recognize.
- Let your baby take his time and pace things himself. Wait for eager mouth opening before offering the spoon
- Talk to your baby and maintain eye contact
- Practice good food hygiene and handling
- Feed a variety of nutrient rich foods. Time to think of the whole family?

<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/pages/healthy-eating.aspx>

- Vitamin supplements. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding your baby, you need to take a daily supplement of 10 µg of Vitamin D. If your baby is older than 6 months and having less than 500ml of formula/day, give them vitamin drops
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/vitamins-minerals/Pages/Vitamin-D.aspx>
- Start to include your baby at family mealtimes
- If your baby is unwell. Increase fluid intake, include more breastfeeding or formula and offer soft, favourite foods.

Suitable first foods include:-

- Soft cooked vegetables or fruit such as butternut squash, sweet potato, carrot, apple, broccoli, potato or courgette are good first weaning foods
- Soft ripe fruits such as melon, peach, banana, pear or avocado or cucumber. Sticks can be cut with a crinkle cutter to make them easier to hold, or food can be pureed. E.g. Avocado and Banana, broccoli and sweet potato, carrot, parsnip and swede are best to start with

Foods you can move on to include:

- Breakfast cereals e.g. Readybrek, porridge, Weetabix
- Eggs which are well cooked until both the yolk and white of the egg are hard
- Yogurts/Fromage frais, preferably natural unsweetened, full fat (not low fat)
- Bread, bread sticks, Chapatti
- Beans, lentils and other pulses well cooked in a tomato or other savoury sauce or mashed baked beans given with a starchy food, e.g. rice, bread or potato
- Cooked pasta
- Cooked rice
- Savoury biscuits
- A wide variety of vegetables
- Finely ground nuts or smooth nut butters, **NOT** whole nuts before 5 years of age, as young children can choke on these
- Grated or chopped fresh or stewed fruit, including cooked dried fruits such as dates and apricots
- Cheese, use cottage cheese or mascarpone cheese to begin with as it contains less salt than hard cheese

- Soya mince, Quorn, tofu
- Avoid processed foods such as ready-made soups and sauces, chocolate as they are usually too salty or have sugar added

- **Allergies ***

Research has shown that delaying higher allergenic foods such as egg, seeds and nuts does not prevent allergy. In fact evidence is showing that early introduction may be beneficial.

If your baby hasn't been diagnosed with any allergies, you can give them nut butters (including peanut butter) or foods containing ground nuts at around 6 months. You should never give whole peanuts or nuts to children under five because of the risk of choking.

For children without eczema who have a family history of allergies a cautious approach is suggested of putting licks of peanut butter on their lip a few times and progress to small amounts at the earliest opportunity.

When you give your baby peanuts for the first time, look out for any signs of an allergic reaction, such as blotchy skin, a runny nose or an upset tummy. If you think your child is having an allergic reaction, you should get urgent medical advice. For mild reactions talk to your GP or contact NHS choices www.nhs.uk. However if you think your baby is suffering from a severe allergic reaction, always call 999 and ask for a paramedic.

- **Salt and Sugar**

Don't be tempted to add salt or sugar (including honey and glucose) to your baby's food. Babies can't taste the difference yet and foods that you may think are tasteless will be perfectly acceptable to them. Your baby's kidneys cannot function as well as your own, so too much salt could be harmful. Also avoid using salty foods such as Marmite, Vegemite and stock cubes at this young age.

IRON

This is an important mineral to consider at 6-9 months of age.

During the first few months of your baby's life either breast milk or infant milk provides all the nourishment needed. Your baby was born with his/her own iron store, but by the age of 6 months this store has started to decrease. ***It is especially important to give a variety of foods rich in iron if your child will not be eating meat.***

Iron is essential for healthy blood and normal growth and development. Babies grow very quickly at this age and insufficient iron may slow down these important processes.

- ☹️ Avoid giving coarse-textured wholegrain cereals, such as such as muesli or coarse textured wholemeal bread. These foods contain phytates which bind with important minerals like iron, stopping them from being used by the body.
- 😊 Foods rich in Vitamin C increase the amount of iron absorbed. Vitamin C is found in fruit, vegetables and fruit juices, so it is useful to include a source of vitamin C at each mealtime
- ☹️ Some high fibre foods, like unprocessed bran, contain substances that reduce iron absorption, therefore high fibre cereals e.g. Weetabix should only be given in small quantities. However, foods such as fine grain wholemeal bread are suitable.
Unprocessed bran should not be given to babies or toddlers.
- ☹️ Tea can reduce iron absorption too. It should be avoided at this age.
- 😊 Ensure milk intake is reduced as solids increase. Aim for no more than 1 pint (600ml) per day or milk or milk equivalent foods e.g. yogurts. Offering more than this can reduce your baby's appetite for solid food or lead to excess weight gain.

Good sources of iron in the vegetarian diet are:-

Eggs	These may be given from 6 months of age and should be cooked until both yolk and white are firm
Pulses	Peas, dried and canned beans, lentils
Vegetables	Especially dark green leafy vegetables, e.g. spinach, peas, green beans and cabbage, and tomato purée
Breakfast Cereals	Many breakfast cereals are fortified with iron - check the labels

Commercial Foods Look out for iron-fortified foods, e.g. character pasta shapes. Some bread is also fortified with vitamins and iron – check the labels.

Try to include a variety of foods in your baby's diet, ensuring you give items from the above list daily. This is essential to achieve an adequate intake of iron. For further information about iron refer to the leaflet 'Iron – an essential mineral' available from www.lnds.nhs.uk

FAMILY MEALS

At around 9-12 months age your baby will be eating three meals a day. Most of the foods the family are having will be suitable. Encourage a variety of foods, flavours and textures.

To ensure a healthy diet, try to provide **one food from each of the following groups at each main meal:-**

1. **Cheese** – cottage, or hard cheese, **yogurt** or **milk** (use full fat varieties)
2. **Lentils, split peas, beans or ground / puréed nuts, Quorn, soya, tofu, eggs** (have one of these at 2 meals each day)
3. **Breakfast cereals, bread, potato, rice pasta, chapattis** (have at each meal)
4. **Fruit, fruit juice** (ensure dilutes 1 part fruit juice to 10 parts water), **vegetables**

DRINKS

It is surprising how many people think that a baby cries only from hunger or discomfort. Babies do get thirsty, especially in warm weather, so ensure that tap water is offered with meals. No need to boil for children over the age of 6 months. Introduce a free flow beaker as soon as possible. Avoid using juices and squash if you want your baby to have healthy teeth.

Milk and Dairy foods

Whole (full fat milk) is suitable for cooking from 6 months of age and as a drink from 12 months of age

Aim for up to 3 portions daily

100-150ml milk

- Whole milk (full fat) for under 2's
- Semi skimmed milk can be introduced from 2 years if your child is eating well
- Skimmed milk is not suitable as a main drink for children until they are 5 years of age.

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If your child does not like milk, you can substitute other dairy products as follows which all equate to 100ml of milk:

1 small 125g pot of yogurt = 100ml milk

2 tbsp. grated cheese or 3 dice sized pieces of cheese = 100ml milk

2 tbsp. custard or milk pudding = 100ml milk

2 tbsp. white sauce = 100ml milk

Other milks

Goat's milk, sheep's milk, soya milks in a carton, rice and nut milks should **not** be given to babies under 1 year of age as they are not nutritionally complete.

A soya-based baby milk formula should only be used for a diagnosed cow's milk intolerance.

RECIPES

The following recipes will help you plan meals and add variety to your baby's diet. You can adapt the consistency of your own vegetarian recipes as well, and remove a portion before it is seasoned, to give to your baby.

PUREES

In the early stages you will find your baby may only require small quantities - portion sizes are a guide only as babies' appetites vary.

You may find your baby only requires one course at this age, savoury at lunchtime and fruity one at teatime

CREAMY PUREE (8-12 Portions)

75g (3oz) of cooked vegetables

2-3 teaspoons baby rice

175ml (6fl oz.) warm formula milk, expressed breast milk or full fat cow's milk

Purée or sieved the cooked vegetables. Mix the baby rice into the warm milk (vary the amount of rice depending on how thick your baby likes it). Stir the baby rice mixture into the puréed vegetables.
Serve to your baby

- Freeze the remaining mixture into ice cube trays for use on another day

VEGETABLES WITH BABY CEREAL (8 portions)

¼ small onion, peeled

1 courgette

2 florets of broccoli

1 medium carrot, peeled and sliced

25g (1oz) green cabbage, shredded

3 tablespoons baby rice

Chop all the vegetables and cook in a small saucepan with just enough water to cover. Cook until vegetables are tender, and then drain off water. Purée or sieve the vegetables and add the baby rice to obtain the texture enjoyed by your baby.

- Any combination of vegetables can be used in this recipe
- Freeze portions not required for use on another day.

VEGETABLE SAVOURY (1-2 portions)

2-3 tablespoons of cooked vegetables, e.g. carrots, cauliflower, broccoli

3 tablespoons full fat natural yogurt

Purée the cooked vegetables and mix into the yogurt.

- Use the same vegetables you are having with your meal. Remember not to add salt to the cooking water.

FRUIT PURÉE (1-2 portions)

Fruit of choice, e.g. banana, stewed apple, stewed apricot, stewed pear, fresh peach

Blend or sieve the fruit with a little water if necessary.

- Individual portions may be frozen in ice-cube trays.
- Baby rice can be added to any puréed fruit to improve the consistency if preferred.

RIPE PEACH DESSERT (1-2 portions)

1 ripe peach – skinned and stone removed

(Canned peaches in natural juice can be used instead)

2 teaspoons natural yogurt

Blend or mash the peach with natural yogurt.

- Try with a nectarine or plums for a different flavour.

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BANANA AND APPLE WITH ORANGE JUICE (1-2 portions)

¼ apple, peeled, cored and chopped

¼ banana, peeled and chopped

1 teaspoon orange juice

Cook the apple in a small saucepan until soft, then mash it together with the banana and orange juice

- You can use any fruit juice, Try pineapple, mango or apple instead.
- Enjoy the rest of the apple and banana yourself.

MASHED FOODS (at around 7-8 months)

POTATO AND TOMATO CHEESE (1-2 portions)

1 egg, beaten

4 tablespoons grated cheese

4 tablespoons mashed potato

2 tablespoons hot milk – formula milk or full fat cow's milk

1 tomato cut into small pieces

Add egg and cheese to the mashed potato. Beat in the hot milk until smooth. Arrange the chopped tomato on the base of a lightly greased pie dish. Put the potato mixture on the top of tomatoes. Bake in a moderately

hot oven 190°C, 375°F, Gas 5 for about 30 minutes until set, risen and golden brown.

LENTIL PURÉE WITH CAULIFLOWER (2 portions)

2-3 florets cauliflower, cooked
4 tablespoons formula milk or full fat cow's milk
25g (1oz) red lentils, cooked
1 tablespoon grated cheese

Put all the ingredients into a small pan, bring to the boil and simmer for a few minutes, add a small amount of water if necessary. Mash together to achieve the texture required by your baby. Sprinkle with grated cheese before serving.

- Serve with mashed potato, pasta or rice for an older baby.

TOMATO AND CHEESE PASTA (3-4 portions)

15g (½oz) margarine
1 large tomato skinned, seeded and chopped
30g (1oz) cheddar cheese, grated
1 tablespoon cottage cheese
1 dessertspoon baby rice (if required)
30g (1oz) dry pasta

Cook the pasta as directed on the packet. While it is cooking, melt the margarine in a small pan, add the tomato and cook over a low heat for 2 minutes.

Remove from the heat and stir in the cheeses, followed by the baby rice to obtain the texture enjoyed by your baby.

Pour the sauce over the cooked pasta.

- Toddlers may also enjoy this meal served with some extra vegetables.

BAKED BEAN QUICKIE (1-2 portions)

2 tablespoons canned baked beans
1 tablespoon cheddar cheese, grated
1 dessertspoon breadcrumbs
1 egg, beaten

Purée or mash the baked beans, add the grated cheese, beaten egg and breadcrumbs. Mix well. Put into a small, greased oven proof dish. Cover with foil and bake at 180°C, 350°F, Gas 4 for 20 minutes.

- Have baked beans on toast with grated cheese for a meal yourself to use up the remaining beans.

YOGURT DESSERT (1-2 portions)

½ ripe banana – mashed

3 tablespoons natural yogurt

Mix the fruit and yogurt together ½-1 hour before serving.

- Stewed apple, stewed pear or mashed strawberries make a tasty alternative to banana.

FAMILY FOOD RECIPES (at around 9-12 months)

Your baby will now be enjoying more variety and moving on to eating the same food as you. A selection of pudding ideas is included. Your baby may enjoy a main course and dessert.

VEGETABLES IN CHEESE SAUCE (4 portions)

100g (4oz) cauliflower
50g (2oz) frozen peas
100g (4oz) courgettes, sliced
1 carrot, peeled and sliced thinly

For the sauce:

25g (1oz) margarine
1½ tablespoons plain flour
120ml (4fl oz.) full fat milk
40g (1½oz) cheese, grated

Cook the cauliflower and carrot in a small amount of water until tender. In a separate pan cook the peas and courgettes until soft. Meanwhile, make the cheese sauce. Melt the margarine in a small saucepan, stir in the flour, cook for a minute then gradually add the milk, stirring all the while until the sauce is thickened and smooth. Remove from the heat and stir in the grated cheese. Mash or chop the cooked vegetables and pour the sauce over them.

- Extra portions can be frozen for use on another day.

MULTI-COLOURED CASSEROLE (3 portions)

1 tablespoon oil
1 small onion, peeled and finely chopped
½ red pepper, seeded and finely chopped
150g (5oz) frozen peas
275g (10oz) sweetcorn, canned or frozen
100g (4oz) cheddar cheese, grated

Heat oil in a frying pan, add the onion and red pepper. Cook for 3 minutes. Meanwhile cook the peas (and sweetcorn if necessary) in boiling water. Drain when cooked. Put all the vegetables into an ovenproof dish. Sprinkle with cheese and bake in a preheated oven for 15 minutes at 180°C, 350°F, Gas 4.

- Any combination of colourful vegetables can be used in this dish.

CHEESEY CUSTARD BAKE (1-2 portions)

1 teaspoon margarine
1 egg
2 small onions, chopped
100ml (4fl oz.) full fat milk
2 medium carrots, sliced
25g (1oz) grated cheese

Heat margarine in a pan and fry the onion and carrot gently for 1 minute. Cover the pan, reduce heat and cook for a further 3 minutes.

Put vegetables into an oven proof dish. Beat the egg lightly, stir in the milk and grated cheese. Pour egg mixture over the vegetables and bake for 30 – 40 minutes at 180°C, 350°F, Gas 4 or until egg mixture is firm.

SEMOLINA WITH FRUIT (2 portions)

1 tablespoon semolina
120ml (4fl oz.) full fat milk
1 ripe pear, apple or banana, chopped into small pieces

Put the milk and semolina into a small saucepan, bring to the boil and simmer for 3-4 minutes. Pour into a dish and add the fresh fruit.

- Apricots or stewed plums make a tasty alternative.

BAKED BANANA (1-2 portions)

1 banana sliced lengthwise
Juice of 1 orange or 3 tablespoons unsweetened orange juice
Margarine or butter
Cinnamon (if desired)

Put the banana into an ovenproof dish. Pour over the orange juice, sprinkle with a little cinnamon and dot with a little margarine. Cover with foil and bake for 10 minutes at 180°C, 350°F, Gas 4.

- Make extra – one each for the rest of the family, delicious!

PEACH MELBA (2-3 portions)

150g (5oz) Greek yogurt
60g (2oz) fromage frais
1 fresh peach or ½ can of peaches – chopped
175g (6oz) raspberries, fresh or canned
1 tablespoon cornflakes, crushed

Mix the yogurt and fromage frais together. Stir in the chopped fruit and sprinkle with the crushed cornflakes.

- Any breakfast cereal, crushed, can be sprinkled over the mixture.
- Enjoy the extra portion yourself

SANDWICHES

Sandwiches make a nourishing meal and your baby will enjoy sandwiches, especially if cut into small shapes.

Choose a variety of different breads; white, brown, wholemeal, granary. Add margarine, then choose a filling:-

- Smooth peanut butter or other nut butters or nut pâté *
- Mashed banana with soft cheese
- Vegetable pâté
- Chopped salad with beans
- Cottage cheese, cheese spread or hard cheese
- Hard-boiled egg, mashed with mayonnaise
- Hummous

*See notes on page 6 (allergies)

Mix and match as desired. Children do like crunchy foods, so try to combine any of the above with some fruit or vegetables.